

**THE BLOG**

Libby:Iraq War::Katrina:Class War

By Marty Kaplan

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Now that BushCo credibility on pre-war intelligence has toppled as dramatically as that statue of Saddam, perhaps the nation's righteous disbelief of *W* can be channeled to the economy.

Well after midnight, it took the Republican House leaders everything but torture to get 217 votes for their plan to cut \$50 billion from student loans, Medicaid, food stamps, and practically every other program that could help, say, the victims of Katrina (though perhaps Tom DeLay was in an antechamber working the car-battery scrotum clamps in case some members of his caucus proved impervious to primary-challenge threats and Abramoff-type bribes).

Not a single Democrat voted for the bill, a rare but gratifying show of the discipline needed to define what being in the opposition means. It's clear now that when Bush climbed up the steps of Air Force One the night of his Potemkin speech in New Orleans, he turned his back on people in need, his sweat-soaked shirt a lie-detector any American watching television could read. Today, with the House Republican bill, that contempt for the vulnerable — the Barbara Bush chuckle about the good ride Katrina gave the disadvantaged — has been extended from the Gulf Coast to the rest of the country.

Except of course for the wealthy. The House next takes up tax cuts for the rich, when it will compete with the Senate's \$60 billion giveaway. Not only does this give the lie to the claim that the budget cuts were designed to cut the historically bloated deficits that a Republican White House and a Republican Congress made out of the Clinton surplus. It is also the clearest possible signal to the country of what Republican policy is: Transfer money from middle- and lower-income Americans to the rich.

Republicans will doubtless respond to this charge with their tired cry of "class warfare." The truth is that their policy is class welfare, and the beneficiaries of that welfare are the oil barons whom Republican Senators protected from perjury, and the Republican mega-donors now ponying up for the media campaign to give the right a majority on the Supreme Court.

But this time, when they cry "class warfare," "soak the rich," and whatever other Orwellian camouflage Frank Luntz's focus groups recommend, maybe it will be different. Today the country is on to Bush. It is just conceivable that his integrity gap on Iraq could nail President Pinocchio on the economy. The country already senses this. Do the people

they elected get it as well? Maybe all it will take to stop the corporate welfare is a handful of Republicans realizing that the party leaders demanding that they sell their souls are only months away from being indicted themselves.

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